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27 March 1955

MEMORANDUM FOR AMBASSADOR COLLINS

Subject: Highlights of Conversation, President Diem, 26 March

1. President Diem asked me to see him last night. Did so, accompanied by Lt Redick as interpreter. Noted that the Palace was on alert security, with additional troops patrolling the Palace grounds and inside the gates. The President himself looked sleepy (he said he had not slept the night before), but he was cheerful. He joked about reports that the Binh Xuyen had mortars trained on the Palace and we might be shelled at any moment.

2. He opened the conversation by relating at length the events of his 25 March meeting with Lam Thanh Nguyen and representatives of other sect leaders. He noted that they had a program about 3-pages long, which they waved in the air but did not show him, stating that he would have to accept the principle of changing his government first before they would reveal what their program was. He said that he told them that the "principle" was as old as man, that a leader could dismiss anyone for dishonesty or incompetency. He told them finally that he would see the principal leaders who had signed the manifesto, not their representatives, since the principals were the ones who had noted that the situation was "grave". They asked what they could tell the press. The President finally told them that they could say that he accepted the principle of having further interviews with the sect Front.

3. The President said that troop morale was high among troops in the City, that officers were telling him that now was the time to go after the Binh Xuyen, that people would be happy at this action. At 1215 on 26 March, he sent a directive to Chief of Police Sang and Delegate to the South Lam placing all present police personnel directly under the Prefecture. He said he would soon order the dissolution of Binh Xuyen shock troops, and in three or four days replace Sang with another Chief of Police.

4. I told the President that this plan was not well thought out, politically, since he was not that certain yet of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai. I told him that he should place himself as the leader of the people of the nation, with the people backing him, prior to any such moves. I suggested that he do this by announcing that his police move had been made because the seat of government, Saigon-Cholon, was a trust for all the people of the nation, and that its safety should not be in the hands of any one individual or small organization, but in the hands of the legal government.

5. Also, I pointed out that the sect manifesto deadline had passed. In effect, the President had won although the sects were threatening to create disorder the coming week. His wisest move would be to announce a meeting of all sect leaders with them in either a week or ten days, telling the people that the sects had not given him a program and that he

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was preparing a program to present to the sects and all the people, concerning the national welfare (including sect folks) which he would have ready by the sect meeting.

6. The President asked me what his program should be. So, I asked him what his program was. He spoke of demobilization, pay for troops, settling on the land, the problems of inflation, and then asked for ideas. I said that I would like to take this up with the Ambassador and some other folks, was sure that all of us could come up with some good advice, if he really wanted it. He said he did. (I was thinking of the Sect Study to be presented to him, which should answer this).

7. The President mentioned that General Jacquot had assured him that he would provide sufficient French troops for the protection of the city in case of necessity.

8. The President mentioned Ho Thong Minh. I told him that Minh was feeling badly about the President's apparent lack of trust in him, that Minh was a young man who might be a bit brash at times, but was the sort of younger and energetic person the President should make use of, and that the President should call in Minh, tell him to cheer up, that the President was counting on him. The President agreed, said he would do this.

EG Lansdale

EDWARD G LANSDALE
Colonel USAF

copies to: General O'Daniel
Mr Kidder
Mr Cooley

